2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
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The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of 'Custodian of the Earth'. This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connexion with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.

The ethnographic picture of to-day suggests that the population of the Voltaic region was, in the past, constantly being redistributed by migrations of small groups. In the absence of written records that is all we can say. The fact that such migrations have gone on in the recent past, and are still going on in the central area, suggests that these migrations were (as they are) the result rather of ecological pressures and social forces than of large-scale conquests. But marauding slave-raiders may have been a cause of migrations in some areas. Two of the most notorious, Samory and Babatu, were spreading devastation in the north-western parts of the region at the time when the French and the British were partitioning the country during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Physically, culturally, in their economic organization, and their social and political structure, the people of Taleland are typical in every respect of the tribes of the central Volta region.

General Characteristics of the Tallensi

The people of the central Volta region are of negroid stock. They are not a notably fine physical type, but the best of them are attractive physical specimens, as may be seen from the photographs in this book. Head measurements of thirteen Tale men gave an average C.I. of 74·7. The predominant head type appears to be dolichocephalic. In skin colour they vary from black through chocolate brown to bronze, which the natives call 'red' (*bon-ze'e*) and regard as the most attractive bodily hue. Their hair is of the usual negroid peppercorn type. They have also the typical negroid nasal and lip forms, but the very broad, flat nose and markedly everted lips are not so common as in the tropical forest belt. Both men and women are of medium stature, the men being slightly the taller. Anybody over 5 ft. 7 or 8 in. is considered tall. Though they are mostly slight in build, all the somatic types with which we are familiar may be seen among these people: the stocky pyknic, the slim asthenic, the stalwart athletic, to use Kretschmer's terminology, are all common. Fat men or women, however, are very rare. Climatic conditions, density of population, and a primitive agricultural technique[1] all conspire to keep the average standard of nutrition low. In the best seasons the natives grow only enough cereals for their needs.[2] Their animal husbandry provides little surplus to exchange for cereals, and they have no crafts worth speaking of. The labour they supply to richer parts of the Gold Coast contributes very little return by way of foodstuffs to the home community. Like most subsistence farmers in Africa, their diet is notably deficient in animal protein.

[1] *Vide* Lynn, C. W., op. cit.

[2] This aspect of Tale economics is more fully discussed in Lynn, op. cit., and in Fortes, M. and S. L., loc. cit.